

**Wholistic Outreach to Marginalized Chinese Immigrants
in Los Angeles Area**

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I. INTRODUCTION

When I first met Xiao Zhang several months ago, I could tell from his eyes that he is a man of hope. It was a pleasant experience to talk to him, a sincere, warm-hearted and loving person. He was so different from the story I first heard about him ...

Xiao Zhang was an illegal immigrant from China. His boss took advantage of his illegal status, and made him labor hard long hours, paid him with unbelievably low wage, and let him sleep in a space not much greater than the size of a closet. He looked miserable and hopeless when he came to Lena's restaurant for a renovation project. Lena has been a Christian for many years, and had regularly help people like Xiao Zhang. After knowing him, Lena often invited him to her restaurant, and cared for his needs, and brought him to her church. It was since then Xiao Zhang's life was changed forever.

Xiao Zhang's life-changing story was a vivid testimony how a local church can be blessed by God to reach those who are poor, needy, oppressed and helpless. It was through the wholistic vision of her church that Xiao Zhang came to know Christ, his pains were soothed, his struggles were tended, his needs were met, his tears were wiped, and his soul was fed.

There are many marginalized Chinese immigrants in the L.A. region. We can often see them wandering around the China town area like lost sheep without direction and purpose. These people are poor and underprivileged. Most of these immigrants have never heard of the Gospel, and they are essentially an unreached group of people that God brought to us here. Yet most of the traditional Chinese churches have difficulty to reach them, not because they do not have hearts for them, but because their middle-class culture and other practical issues make them difficult to reach these people.

I saw a huge sign of “Toys For Tots” on my way to campus this morning. This is indeed a wonderful way to extend our hands and to express our love and care toward the needs of many underprivileged kids and families during the Christmas season. At the same time, I hope and pray that these good deeds will be extended with many deeper actions and relationships toward these families after the Christmas season. As Grigg sadly points out in his book, many of church ministries today “has given bread to the poor and has kept the bread of life for the middle class.” (Grigg, p. 12, 2005) This is probably the area needed for many middle-class churches to work on today. I pray that the churches can go to these families not only with ‘toys’, but also with the Bread of Life, the good new of Jesus Christ that can truly satisfy their hunger.

It is marvelous to see how God has planted burdens in the hearts of a team of about 10 church leaders since the beginning of the year, and pulled them together to begin a new urban ministry, specifically targeting this group of people. I am honored to be one of them. I am also grateful to know that there are now a few untraditional Chinese churches and ministries with a dedicated vision to reach these poor illegal immigrants. Their ministries and good works among this group of people have brought attention to the Chinese church community, and even the news media, for example, the Ming En Church and the Harold Ministry in the NYC China Town area (World Daily News, July 23, 2006), the Restaurant Gospel Ministry in the CA Bay Area, etc. (L.A. Times, June 14, 2006) Their experiences and strategies to reach these people are precious lessons for us as we now plan and develop our ministry methodology and strategies to reach the poor Chinese immigrants in the L.A. area.

In this report, we are to develop a wholistic ministry methodology and strategy to reach many marginalized Chinese immigrants, like Xiao Zhang, in the L.A. area. We will first discuss who these poor Chinese immigrants are and where they originally from, what they did and do now in the clarification section. The theological assessments about the poor and the causes for poverty will be given next in the conceptualization section. We will then conclude this paper in the confrontation section, by presenting a proposed wholistic ministry strategy to reach to this group of people in the L.A. area.

II. CLARIFICATION

Chen Deng came to U.S. illegally when he was fourteen years old. To help him and his family find a better life in the U.S., his parents paid \$45,000 (the charge is now more than \$70k) to an international smuggling group to smuggle him into U.S. This smuggle fee is not a trivial money for typical Chinese families. (According to the Worldbank report, the average income in China was \$280 in 1985 and it was \$1,290 in 2005.) Therefore, his parents had to go to local high-interest money lenders to pay the smuggling fee.

In order to pay the huge debt, Chen Deng sought work immediately after arriving U.S. But it was difficult for him to find a good-pay job because he was too young and little, not to mention his illegal status. Through one of his father's friends, he finally got to work in a clothing factory, making \$400-\$500/month and living in a tiny room crowded with 8 persons.

Chen Deng desired to go to school, yet he had to give up his dream due to his long-hour and hard-labored work. The stress, difficulty, and loneliness in this youth's life

often made him depressed and hopeless. He was often crushed by the cruel realities, even up to a point, that he was thinking about to commit suicide. But this dreadful thought was immediately gone once he thought about his family, for their safety, threatened by the money lenders, was pretty much dependent on the money he sent back home. So Chen Deng was totally stuck in the U.S. without knowing what to do, rather than working in long-hour mundane jobs day after day (New York Times Magazine, June 11, 2006.)

It is estimated that there are about 350,000 illegal Chinese immigrants like Chen Deng in the U.S. (The Duowei Times, June 2, 2006) Studies show that these people came here mainly through two means. First, some came through international smuggling groups. Second, some first came here with legal visas, like tourism, business, student etc., and chose to stay here even after their visas expired.

It is estimated 90% of those smuggled to the U.S. were from Fujian, one of China southeast coastal province and the rest from the cities like Beijing, Guongzhou, Wenzhou, and regions like Northeast China. (The Duowei Times, June 2, 2006) During 1980-90, most of these people were smuggled in groups by ship. However, this tactic was largely disrupted due to the famous “Golden Adventure” running aground incident outside of New York city in 1993. Since then, these people may come to the U.S. through air, cargo, even land, by first going through to a third country. These smuggling activities are mostly operated by organized, structured, internationalized crime groups.

Generally speaking, this is not a well-educated group. They mostly do not speak English, and are lack of professional skills. Therefore, they mostly work in Chinese restaurants, clothing factories, construction sites, etc. It is normal for them to work ~12 hours everyday. Some of them may get paid merely as little as \$4 per hour.

Beers Research estimated that there are 25-40% Asian illegal immigrants who first came to U.S. with valid visas, yet chose to stay here after their visas expired. (The Duowei Times, June 2, 2006) The background of this group of people is much more diverse than that of the smuggled group. They may be businessmen, professors, engineers, scientists, doctors, farmers, labors, etc. Most of them belonged to the middle-class when they were in China. Even so, they often work in the low-paid labor jobs in the U.S. because many of them do not speak English well.

We do not know how many of these 350,000 illegal immigrants live in the L.A. area now. More studies are needed to reasonably estimate this number. There are about 1.4 millions Asian immigrants in L.A. County alone. (World Daily News) We also know the L.A. area has the largest Chinese population in the U.S.; we thus think that there must be a significant number of this kind of immigrants residing in the this region.

It is reported that many of them are 'homeless.' They sleep in the "garage inns" – unfurnished garages with worn mattresses on the floor – of local Chinese families. As many as 20 people sleep in shifts, paying \$4 a "bed" at night or \$3 during the day. (Los Angeles Times, April 2, 2006) Their harsh living conditions plus the long-hour mind-numbingly mundane works often make their lives filled with boredom, misery and hopelessness. Their desires for breakthrough and hungers for success often drive them to take irrational risks in order to reach their goals. The local gambling industry, seeing this as a golden business opportunity, lures them to casinos providing them free rides (with a fleet of buses,) free meals and even with free small changes (as their gamble startup funds.) In addition to their high risk in gambling, we heard that some of them have problems with drug, alcohol, sex, etc.

It is surprising to learn that there are about 500,000 Chinese legal immigrants living below the U.S. poverty standard (World Daily News, March 24, 2006.) If this estimate is correct, we will also need to carefully study this group of people, and devise effective outreach strategies to reach them for they may be also overlooked by today's middle-class churches.

In his book, Grigg divides the urban poor into three major distinct categories: inner-city slums, squatters, and specialized groups. (Grigg, p.12, 2005) It is undoubted that these illegal Chinese immigrants belong to the third kind of Grigg's categories. This leads to our need to develop special strategies to reach and to help them. The strategies presented in this paper are merely the result of our first efforts. There will surely be more refinement and adjustments as we enter into this new ministry. With that, we are to study what the Bible teaches us "who are the poor?", "why are they poor?" and "what should the church respond to them?"

III. CONCEPTUALIZATION

Who are the poor?

Grigg says that there are 245 references in the Bible describing "the poor", "poverty" or "lack." (Grigg, p.25, 1990) This large number of occurrences tells us how important this subject is in God's eyes. However, for many of us, the word "poor" is simply a vague concept. It is no wonder how Grigg sarcastically says "to many Americans, the entire world is poor, including the middle class of the Third World." (Grigg, p.13, 2005)

Here in this section, we would like to study the meaning of “poor” in the Bible with the followings questions in mind: Is the word “poor” used in the Bible referring to those who are poor materially only? Can it be also refer to those who are poor in spirit? Does the Bible also teach us who they are and why they are poor? What should the church respond to them?

Most scholars think that there are between five to seven Hebrew root words from which their derived terms are used in the Bible to describe the poor and poverty. Yet each of these words contains a spectrum of meaning. It is the purpose here to understand who the poor are in the Bible by studying the spectrum of meaning of these words. Here we summarize the word study on the “poor” presented in “Christian Witness to the Urban Poor,” Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization, Wheaton, IL, 1980.

The poor are those oppressed, downtrodden, humiliated. This is expressed by the verb root word עָנָה and its derived עָנִי and עָנָו. The verb עָנָה means “to force to submission, reduce to subservience, oppress, subjugate, do violence to, violate, degrade, rape, ... take a woman sexually by force.” (EDOT) עָנִי is a passive adjective to describes a person forced to submission; and the derived noun עָנָו refers to the same person as submissive to that forcing.

The poor are those who are powerless and diminished. This is derived from the usage of the verb root דָּלַל and its associated words דָּל and דָּלָה. The verb means “to become powerless, impotent, ineffectual, debilitated, weakened; lose bulk and strength, be diminished; so be drooping, dangling, hanging down.” (TWOT) The usage of דָּל never means “people who have become poor by their own fault” in the Scripture.

(TDOT) דִּלְיָה “emphasizes the social lowliness and poverty of those people it describes.”

(EDOT)

The poor are those who are yearning and insistent. The word אֲבִיּוֹן describes the person who is always longing for what his poverty denies him. But אֲבִיּוֹן has no sense of greed; he is the poor seen as yearning desperately for justice and right.

The poor are those who are needy and in want. The Hebrew word חָסֵר may be used as a verb or an adjective, and its derived noun form מַחְסוֹר. The verb חָסַר means “to be diminished, ..., in want.” Its adjective usage, mostly found in Proverb, refers to “the lack of ... understanding” (TWOT). It may also mean as “shortage of bread, oil, etc.” Its noun form מַחְסוֹר means “want, shortage, lack.” This want may arise from injustice and from personal faults like laziness (Prov 6:11).

The poor are those who are subject and dependent. The verb root סָכַן means “to bring to the ground,” and “to make someone assume a low position inferior to oneself, make subordinate and dependent.” Its adjective form מְסֻכָּן denotes “the act of subjection” (TDNT).

The poor are those who are diminished and impoverished. The verb form מוֹדַד describes one “financially diminished, sunk into poverty,” but this situation may be reversed if finance can be found.

The poor are those who are destitute and bereft. The verb root רָשַׁע “suggests destitution.” (EDOT) This word is “related to the dispossessed” (IBD), i.e., those

deprived of family heritage in land, etc. (Prov. 30:8) Its noun form עֲנִי means “destitution,” which implies deep material poverty which is exclusively economic. (TDNT and DNTT) While this is “the condition common to the lower class” (TWOT), the rich may come to it through debt (Prov 22:7), laziness (6:11), or worthless pursuits (28:19). The destitution may also come from injustice.

The poor are those who are dispossessed and evicted. This meaning is derived from the verb root עָנָה, which means “to take possession of” something from another, either by inheriting it or by depriving him of it. “When people are the object, it sometimes means ‘to dispossess’ ... putting them in such a social position that they cannot hold possession or inherit ... to cause someone to be dispossessed is to impoverish him.” (EDOT) Note that dispossession may also come through personal faults like laziness, self-indulgence; and dispossession is not born into poverty but reduced to it.

There are quite a few Greek words ‘poor’ or ‘needy’ used in the NT. But here I only present the meanings of four of them. First, the word πτωχός is a person who is economically disadvantaged, e.g. Lk 6:20, or extremely inferior in quality. It may also refer to a person who is lacking in spiritual worth. Second, γυμνιτεύω means a person being inadequately clothed, poorly dressed, e.g. Mt 25:36,38, 43f; Js 2:15. Third, the word ὑστέρησις, describes the condition of lacking that which is essential, need, lack, or poverty, e.g. Mk 12:44. Fourth, the word ἐνδεής refers to a person who is in need of material possessions, poor, or impoverished, e.g. Ac 4:34. (BDAG)

The word study on ‘poor’ offers us better understanding who the poor are, and what they are like. Also, this study helps us get a sense why they are poor. This is exactly the topic that we are to examine next: what are the causes for poverty?

Why are the poor poor?

It is a complex and challenging subject to study the causes of poverty. Many studies are done from the human science viewpoint like religion, culture, anthropology, etc. (e.g., Grigg, ch 4, 2005) Here we focus only on the causes that are described, directly or indirectly, in the Bible. We find it is much more manageable using Ajulu's analysis approach by dividing these biblical causes of poverty into two categories: self-imposed or externally-imposed. (Ajulu, 1999)

Ajulu defines self-imposed poverty caused by human's own sinfulness and rebellion against God and others. These self-imposed causes of poverty include, e.g., just name a few: laziness (Prov. 6:9-11), drunkenness (Prov. 23:20), wicked deeds (Prov. 13:25), indulgence (Prov. 21:17), idleness (Prov. 14:23, 1 Thess 5:14.) And she views that the biblical teachings about the causes of self-imposed poverty are still relevant today (Ajulu, 1999.)

On the other hand, externally-imposed poverty is caused by involuntary forces that the poor have no control over it. These involuntary forces may be from either nature or the sinfulness of others. Involuntary poverty may be due to natural disasters like famine (Gen 12:10), drought (1 Kings 17:1-16), earthquake, volcano (Gen 19:24-29), etc. But the Bible tells us that the externally-imposed poverty is mostly caused by other party. It is because these externally-imposed sinfulness and rebellions make people be poor. We may further divide these external sinful and rebellious acts into two different categories: personal (or a group of people) and institutional.

On the personal level, the sinful and rebellious acts, making someone in poverty, are done by either an individual or a group of people. On this level, Beisner observes that

in some cases poverty results from people's violation of God's law, for example, to refuse prompt payments of wages (Dt. 24:14-15.) In other cases, poverty results from people's violation of justice, for example, the rulers love bribes and chase after gifts (Isa 1:23.) (Ajulu, p. 78-9, 1999; Beisner, p. 196, 1988.)

The Bible also teaches us that there exists a structural and institutionalized form of human sinful acts which lead to a condition that the poor are unable to change or resist. Ajulu defines structural poverty is the result of "institutional arrangements that either completely neglect issues concerning the poor or function in ways that directly contribute to increased poverty." (Ajulu, p.80, 1999) These institutional arrangements often go through unnoticeably the social, economic, political and legal systems we live on everyday; and they are often interpreted as legalized oppressions by biblical scholars (Ajulu, 1999; Sider, p. 121, 1977.) An biblical example of institutionalized oppression is given in Isa 10:1-4 where Isaiah speaks against legislators for devising unjust laws and oppressed decrees to deprive the poor of their rights and justices.

This institutional oppression is usually done unnoticeably, and its impact on poverty is thus often overlooked. Moreover, its organized structure makes it difficult for the poor to detect, so to defend their welfares.

So far, we have discussed the intentional offenses (both personal and institutional) to the poor. And I think that the poor may be hurt by unintentional offenses too (both personal and institutional.) For instance, most of us like to shop at Wal-Mart because of its greatly priced merchandises. But in order to maximize its profit, Wal-Mart would often order its goods from many third-world countries with extremely stringent pricing condition. Under this price pressure, the Wal-Mart's third-world suppliers would often in

turn squeeze their workers' wages and benefits, and disregard their unbearable working conditions in order to maintain their competitive edges. Therefore, our shopping at Wal-Mart might have indirectly and negatively affected, though unintentionally, many poor workers in the third world.

There is another important dimension of forces that may produce poverty – the powers and the principalities of the air. Paul says in Eph 6:12 that “our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.” This suggests the struggle of the poor is not simply due to the man-made problems and systems. There actually exists an unseen spiritual powers of evil behind all the self-imposed and externally-imposed poverty: personal or institutional, intentional or unintentional. These unseen spiritual forces make people follow “the ways of the world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air.” They are thus important factors for causing poverty that we should not forget. Instead, we should always remember that our service to the poor is really a spiritual warfare, and we ought to “put on the full armor of God” so that we may effectively minister them.

Before moving to a different topic, I would like to comment the work done by Hanks. Hanks' word study on both 'oppression' and 'poverty' leads him to conclude that oppression is the *basic* cause of poverty. (Hanks, p. 33, 59, 1983) I admit that I am uncomfortable with his use of the word '*basic*' for it means either “of, pertaining to, or forming a base; fundamental” or “of, being, or serving as a starting point or basis.” (The American Heritage Dictionary) I think his conclusion may be a bit too strong, though his study does suggest that oppression is a significant factor for poverty. He even admits that a strong conclusion may mislead those Marist-oriented readers to conclude that

“oppression is the only cause of poverty and thus gather ammunition for their revolution to transform oppressive structure.”

I think that oppression is definitely an important factor for poverty, and we ought to fight against it when ministering to the poor. But emphasizing it too much would make the oppressors be our enemies and forget who the enemy really is. In this, I would agree with Linthicum’s assessment that our real enemy behind poverty should be Satan and the spiritual forces of evil, not the people who are under their control. (Linthicum, 1991) We ought to remember that there is a unseen “level of evil which goes beyond its systems and the people who occupy those systems. There is a spiritual dimension in the victimization of the poor and the power-accruing activity of the systems.” (Linthicum, 1991)

In summary, the causes of poverty can be categorized as: self-imposed and externally-imposed poverty. And the externally-imposed poverty can be grouped into: personal and institutional, or intentional and unintentional. In addition, we should not forget that poverty is also a spiritual problem. Therefore we can need to put on the full armor of God when ministering the poor, for we will have to wrestle with the powers and the principalities of the air.

What should the church respond to the poor?

Linthicum mentions there are three distinctly different responses that any church can respond the poor in its city. (Linthicum, p.21, 1991) He accesses that the church should be with the poor in the city rather than simply in the city or to the city. It means that the church should incarnate herself in that community; and respects those people and perceives them as being people of great wisdom and potential. His assumption is based

on the assumption that the people who are best able to deal with a problem are the people who most affected by the problem.

I'd totally agree with Linthicum's assessment here if we follow his community organization strategies to help the poor. But it seems difficult and impractical to adopt the community organization approach to reach this special Chinese group in the L.A. region. In addition, I have some reservations about the wisdom of the poor, for it may go astray sometimes if not checked. Considering the special circumstances in these Chinese immigrants, I propose to use a hybrid 'to the people and with the people' strategy to reach them. In this hybrid approach, the church, with the help of these poor, will first identify what their actual felt-needs are (with the people). The church and the poor will then work together to develop ministries to solve their felt-needs biblically (both to the people and with the people.) This is exactly the subject we are to discuss in the confrontation section.

CONFRONTATION

The confrontation section will be proceeded using three basic strategic questions we have for this ministry: 1) Who are we? 2) Where are we going? 3) How will we get there?

Who are we?

God loves this group of marginalized Chinese immigrants so much that He has initiated the hearts of many Chinese churches and Christians to reach them. We have seen some significant ministry working among them. For example, there was a cross-church evangelistic meeting, specially targeting this group of people, on Dec. 6, 2006.

It also was a blessed experience to see how God has worked in other areas to reach them. As I mentioned above, I am amazed how God has pulled us, a team of about 10 full-time Chinese coworkers, together into this new challenging, yet God-honored ministry. Some of them are now pastors of local churches, and have their own congregational bases (with 20-50 members.)

There are challenges for this ministry though. First, we admittedly do not have an effective model for us to follow to reach the marginalized immigrants. It is partly due to that many Chinese churches today view this type of ministry is not a primary task, but an add-on. Therefore, the impacts of their ministries are very minimal. It means that we will have many “tries and errors”, failures and adjustments and refinements in the ministry. We’ll have to pray that God will give us wisdom to effectively reach these people.

Second, we also need to wrestle with the model that fits in this ministries. Should we minister and serve only to these marginalized poor? If this is the case, where will the resources be to support this ministry? Or in addition serving the poor, should we also minister to the affluent middle-class Christians at the same time, and encourage them to serve the poor as testimonies? How should we do it then, if it is the case? It is my vision now leaning toward building a community church with special vision serving the poor in the community. (Of course, it is subjected to change or modify if needed.)

Yet thank God for there is hope in Him. We have the calling and vision to reach these rejected Chinese immigrants. It is our belief that His Name will be glorified and His Kingdom will be expanded among these marginalized Chinese immigrants. We believe we will be able to see Jesus in and through these people if we serve them faithfully.

Where we are going?

Vision Statement: It is our calling and vision to plant a community church, among the poor in the L.A. Chinese community, that is “the visible manifestation of the invisible Christ,” through a harmonious balance between faith and works. (Ellison, p. 108, 1997)

Purpose Statement: God calls us to be a wholistic church in the community, of the community and with the community. That is, the church is to be the salt and light of the community through: 1) our active daily good works (worship) in the community, 2) our effective witnesses (evangelism) to the community, 3) our expansion of heaven citizenship (baptism) within the community, 4) our equipping citizens (discipleship) for the community, 5) our all-priesthood services (ministry) to the poor and the community, and 6) our social actions (service) to the community. A wholistic church is to minister the felt needs of her members and the community in the following area: spiritual, cognitive, relational, emotional, and physical (Ellison, p.102.) The result of this wholistic ministry is not only the poor and the community come to Christ, but also the shalom of God will be brought into the community.

Mission Statement: Worship and glorify God by bringing the poor and the community to Christ, uniting them into the church community, maturing them into Christ-like persons, and sending them out to the community and the world with faith and works, so that biblical shalom can be realized in the community.

How will we get there?

Some of our coworkers have started ministering among this group of Chinese immigrants. Their experiences working among these people has given us good first-hand

information how to reach them. But, with the purpose and mission statements in mind, we will need to do the following.

Planning stage – survey, network and evaluation. First, we'll need to research the group and the community in more details. The purpose of this research is to find out what the felt needs are in these people and in the community. To accomplish this end, we will first assess these people and the community by interviewing with selective leaders, surveying a large number of people, social science resources, and census data, etc. (Ellison, p.102, 1997) This information and data will be cataloged into a list of most frequently and deeply felt needs among them.

In his work, Ellison summarizes all human felt needs into five areas: spiritual, cognitive, relational, emotional, and physical, and gives us several specific expressions of each felt need. This information, and his community and church assessment sheets are good starting points for us as we consider how and what to survey in this group of people and community.

Ellison stresses the importance for the churches to address the felt needs on both individual and corporate levels. (Ellison, p.102, 1997) Neglecting the felt needs on the corporate level would force us to be reactive rather than proactive, and it would also force us to a very narrow set of concerns. In this poor Chinese immigrant community, the corporate issues I can think of now would be their legal immigration concern, insecurity and oppression at employment, language communication, their lack of housing and community, medical accessibility, gambling addiction, etc. As suggested by Ellison, it would be wise for the church to consider intervention at a corporate level which, if successful, may alter the root causes for these needs. In our analysis, we also need to be

sensitive to the hidden structural sins behind these corporate felt needs, as we just described in the conceptualization section above. Sometimes, it may be necessary for the church to confront these hidden structural sins in order to effectively resolve the felt needs of the poor and the community.

A corporate felt-need example I may think of is the need of housing and community for these marginalized poor. To meet this need, the church may have to consider to partnership with the L.A. Dream Center (we both are under the Four Square Gospel denomination) to house these immigrants and build up a healthy Christian community for them. However, there are technical difficulties in this suggestion for many of the marginalized poor do not have legal immigration status. We pray God grant us wisdom to solve this need.

We would also need to assess the resources (people and materials) inside and outside of ourselves in this evaluation stage. Again Ellison provides a list of questions to help us to identify resources available in the ministry.

There is also another important aspect in this survey/networking stage, reminded by Linthicum (Linthicum, p.46, 1991) That is, we also need to find out who are the leaders and who are the people with a “fire in their belly” in the community. Basically, we need to identify all the possible people who may be beneficial to the ministry in the community. Also, Linthicum remind of us the importance to have a good record-keeping and retrieval system for keeping the information we collect as much as we can. (Linthicum, p.47, 1991) This information will be critical for us to prioritize the felt needs and ministry possibilities.

Even during the search stage, we should also begin to minister to the felt needs in personal or small group level, through personal visit, assistance, counseling and guidance, and small evangelistic Bible study group. In addition, we plan to open a community center to provide a place for people to rest (many of the poor are virtually homeless,) to relax, (playing ping-pong, etc.) or to read (Chinese books, magazines and newspapers.) This center will also provide them with minimum counseling services (language, legal, medical, housing, mental, etc.) The activities of the community center will be served as mostly pre-evangelism ministries to these people. The people we reach at this state may well be the base of people when we begin our new community church services.

There is another pressed issue we'd have to address in our ministry soul-searching stage. Since our called mission is to serve the poor and its community where these poor are, how should then we do our ministry? Should we start our ministry focusing on the poor first, or on the community (mostly middle-class) first? Or should we start our ministry with both of them in mind, and emphasize neither?

There are some debates about the strategies how the church should approach the marginalized. Should we reach them from bottom and top or from top to bottom? One strategy, so called "trickle-down", supports the proposition that the lower classes will be better served and reached if the ministry is backed by a people of an economic and social step or two above them. But, Courtney argues the difficulty of the "trickle-down" method in practice, and suggests a modified "trickle-down" model by imposing three additional conditions. First, the middle class does not trickle down to form churches among the poorer classes. Second, a wholistic ministry vision is to impress on both the middle and

upper classes and the lower classes. Third, this vision must be strictly enforced and maintained in church teaching and ministry. (Courtney, p.15, 1987)

But on the other hand, we find some good examples of how a middle-class church can effectively bless the urban outcasts. Their approaches are more like the “trickle-down” strategy mentioned before. An example like this is the urban ministry done by the Allen Temple Baptist Church in Oakland, CA. The impacts of their urban ministry is so prevailed and penetrated that the mayor of Oakland once commented, “It is hard to think of any community action that hasn’t been impacted upon by Allen Temple.” (Bennett, 1983)

I prefer the term “balanced ministry model” used by Ellison (Ellison, p.108, 1997) to the “trickle-down model” as we come to consider the church planting strategy to reach these marginalized Chinese immigrants and the middle-class community. Here our vision for this ministry is clear: we need to serve both the poor and the community where the poor are, following the principle taught in the Bible that God loves all the people: both the poor and the middle-class in our case. Knowing there will be challenges and questions, even conflicts when serving these two groups at the same time under a same ministry leadership, we thus have to closely follow the leading of the Holy Spirit to see to build a balanced ministry among the poor and the community.

Since we now have a team of 10 or so church leaders, we may divide the ministry into several different groups with each emphasizing different target(s) in the ministry, according to each leader’s calling and gifts. Though each group may have different tasks and goals, we still serve the Lord with the same vision that God put onto us, that is, to serve the poor Chinese immigrants and its community. To ensure that our group

ministries aligned to the vision, we need to re-evaluate our plans monthly at least initially, and less frequent at later time till we all agree we're all in the right track toward the ministry vision.

Last, but not the least, is the financial resources needed for starting this ministry. We believe "The Lord Will Provide," as long as we are on His side; and we see God had initiated some good works for the ministry. We praise the Lord that each participating Four-Square Chinese church will share the ministry startup fund. Many denomination leaders of the Four-Square Gospel Church are well aware of the Chinese ministry, and constantly remind us of the importance of expanding Chinese ministry in the denomination. Though our first ministry grant proposal was denied, we're encouraged to refine the proposal and resubmit it to the denomination headquarter in Feb. We trust the Lord will further provide us the needed fund through other channels, as we start to reach the poor and the community.

Implementing stage – Wholistic church ministry and service. As stated many times already, our vision for this ministry to build a church that may minister the poor and the community wholistically.

So what would this wholistically-minded church be like? A simple answer would be it is a church of God that ministers the felt-needs of her members and the community in the five areas Ellison defines: spiritual, cognitive, relational, emotional and physical, as already stressed few times earlier. The wholistic ministry, in my view, is the norm that the Bible teaches, for example, Acts 4:32-35; 2 Cor 8-9; James 1:26-27; 2:14-17. Therefore, what we will do to reach the poor and the community wholistically is simply an example to follow the teachings of the Bible.

So how should we implement the wholistic ministry in the L.A. Chinese community? Please note that we have followed the Ellison's principles of felt-need outreach in some of our following thoughts. (Ellison, p.102, 1997)

First, we'll first start new church services specially targeting the poor and the community. Here we may need to consider to have separate services for the poor and the community because of the differences in their daily schedules and needs. In addition to the regular worship and church ministry for the community middle-class group, there will be several week night worship services and expository/evangelistic Bible study meetings for the marginalized poor due to their peculiar working schedules. An intentional balance in these ministries will be emphasized in all six key church functions in our purpose statement: worship, evangelism, fellowship, edification, ministry and service. In his book, Warren gives practical guidelines how we should communicate, organize, and apply the purposes of the church ministry. (Warren, 1995) These principles are worthy of considering and evaluating as we devise the church organizations and strategies to reach the poor and the community. The goal is to let the vision and purposes of the church into submerge into the lives and bloods of the church members, both the poor and the community.

Second, the community center services will be expanded, as the resources permitted, with more extensive coverings, like counseling, housing, employment, tutoring, language, services etc.

Third, we'll prioritize and identify compassion ministries based on the felt-need evaluation done in the planning phase. Ministry possibilities and identified felt needs will be clearly and pervasively publicized through multiple channels of communication within

the church. These ministries should be appropriately interlocked with the other key church functions: worship, evangelism, discipleship, and edification. Each ministry will not be materialized until “the church leadership and the laity have prayed together” on many occasions and “have a sense of the Spirit’s leading.” (Ellison, p.106, 1997) The church is to encourage and identify the leader of each compassion ministry considering his/her spiritual gifts and calling. This leader and the church will then draw up the corresponding short-range and long-range plans (one-month to five years) based on the church resources. A new compassion ministry will usually start with small plans along with ongoing, regular evaluation and adjustments.

These compassion ministry teams should be publicly commissioned with specific prayers for God’s anointing. Periodic public reports should in turn be given to inform the church leaders and congregation of ministry endeavors, so that continuing, specific prayer is encouraged. These practices will help permeate and reinforce the church values and purposes to the church community.

Fourth, Jesus said to his disciples, “the harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.” Even Jesus recognizes the fact of “no worker, no harvest.” Therefore, we will constantly recruit and disciple new members and believers, and will continue to identify potential leaders (staffs or laymen) in the church community. They are to be mobilized by the callings of responsibility of laity for evangelistic, discipleship and compassion ministries, through the regular communication of the church vision and purposes.

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